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REVIEWS

Akbar the Great Mogul. By VINCENT SMITH. New York, Oxford University Press, 1918.—xvi, 504 pp.

Akbar the Great Mogul was by common consent one of the greatest monarchs known to history. Absolutely uneducated, hardly able even to sign his name, he took keen interest in all kinds of literature, art and philosophy. Religion was his particular hobby, but not religion in the narrow sense of the term. Born of orthodox Muslim parents (his father died of wounds received by an accident which he met with when descending a marble staircase to say his prayers in proper time) he displayed a remarkable tolerance of other religions, and spent the greater part of his leisure time in listening to expositions of religious doctrine by professors and scholars of all creeds and sects. He showed equal respect to the religious leaders of all faiths and spent large sums of money in securing the presence at his court of the best available representatives of all religions. Among his specially invited and honored guests there figured several Christian fathers (Jesuits) on whom he showered numerous favors and honors, at times even consulting them in affairs of state. These Christian fathers have left voluminous records of their impressions of the king and his court, of his character and polity, and of the country and its conditions. These records have been freely used in the preparation of this book. It is not improbable that Mr. Smith has put a rather exaggerated faith in the accuracy of their statements of Akbar's leanings toward Christianity, and of his dislike of his own religion. I have no doubt that some of their statements are lacking in foundation, particularly those relating to the deliberate desecration of mosques at Lahore (my home town). There is no evidence that Akbar ever gave up Islam. He was born of Muslim parents, and died a Muslim, though his religion was more eclectic than dogmatic. At one time his admirers tried to raise him to the dignity of an inspired prophet who had come to preach and found a new religion.

Akbar was an all-round genius. His claim to greatness, says Mr. Smith, "rests securely on the basis of his extraordinary natural gifts, his original ideas, and his magnificent achievements." Called to the throne at the age of thirteen, under circumstances of extreme difficulty

and delicacy, with chaos, disorder, rebellion, treachery, insubordination and disaffection all around him, he refused to accept prudent counsels which advised him to retire to the home of his fathers in Kabul, for a time, to mature his plans for the reconquest and consolation of his father's empire. He led most of his expeditions in person, was "a brilliant soldier and pre-eminently a successful general" with a genius for organization not common in any part of the world.

Mr. Smith has told the story of Akbar's life and administration with great lucidity, thoroughness and general impartiality, but at places is rather unduly hard on him, forgetting the times in which he lived and worked. Akbar had the faults of his age. Any one placed in such an irresponsible position as he was, having undisputed and autocratic sway over millions of people, and over vast areas of land, would at times, and on occasions, do things which do not accord with the ethical standards of an advanced humanity. Nor was Akbar quite free from the vices of his class.

The most interesting part of the story is that which deals with Akbar's statesmanship in winning the confidence and allegiance of Hindus, who then, as now, formed the bulk of the Indian population. He established the closest social relations with them, studied their religion, abolished all discriminations based on race and religion, raised some of them to the highest positions in the realm, and otherwise made them feel as if in Akbar they had a king of their own choice, and not one who was an entire stranger to the land and its people.

The most valuable part of Mr. Smith's volume, however, is the one that deals with the fiscal administration of Akbar and the economic condition of the peoples of India in his time. In this respect the data left by Akbar's historiographers stand unique not only in Asia, but probably in the whole world of that period. Abul Fazel, Akbar's historian, who was also his prime minister, left a complete table of the rates, wages and prices that prevailed in the time of Akbar, on the basis of which one can make a fairly good comparison of conditions in India at that time and at present. Vincent Smith has made the comparison and the following are his results.

First as to wages and food prices : The normal wage of an unskilled laborer was from $1\frac{1}{4}$ pence to $1\frac{1}{2}$ pence a day ; that of a skilled workman about $4\frac{1}{4}$ pence a day. Comparing the price of wheat as it prevailed in Akbar's time, with what it was in British India in 1901-1903, Mr. Smith shows that while in Akbar's time a rupee (35 cents) could purchase 194.25 pounds of wheat, in 1901-1903 it could purchase only twenty-nine pounds. But "the low prices were not con-

fined to grain." Nearly everything else was equally cheap. For instance, a sheep of the ordinary kind could be bought for less than fifty cents; thirty-four pounds of mutton could be had for thirty-three cents, and eighty-nine quarts of milk also for the same price. In 1913 the prices of food grains had increased considerably above those of 1901-1903, viz., in the proportion of 141 to 199 (according to the Parliamentary bluebook for 1913-14). In Akbar's time a man could thus "feed himself adequately for a cost of from a penny to two pence (four cents) a day." Fish was purchasable at "such easy rates as if they were not worth valuing." It is repeatedly said by the European visitors of the time that "the plenty of provisions" was "very great throughout the whole monarchy;" "everyone there" could "eat bread without scarceness."

Mr. Smith's summing up of the net results of these comparisons is so valuable that we give it in his own words:

The rise in prices in the course of three centuries has been something like 500 or 600 per cent. The rise in wages has not been so great. I doubt if it comes up to 300 per cent. In Akbar's time the daily wage of the unskilled laborer was one-twentieth of a rupee. During my service in the United Provinces, between 1871 and 1900, the familiar current rate paid by Europeans was one-eighth of a rupee (*i. e.*, 4 cents), but natives of the country often paid less. The fraction one-eighth is 250 per cent larger than one-twentieth. The increase in the wages of skilled labor may be even less, and has hardly more than doubled. I refer to up-country conditions, not to Calcutta or Bombay. On the whole, so far as I can judge, the hired landless laborer in the time of Akbar and Jahangir probably had more to eat in ordinary years than he has now.

Concerning the material condition of the cultivator:

The advance in prices does not affect the cultivators so much. We must remember that the absolutely landless laborer is not common in the country districts. I doubt if the cultivators on the whole were better off three centuries ago than they are now, and it is possible that they may have been less prosperous.

To my knowledge the absolutely landless laborer is becoming very common now.

No less remarkable are the conclusions about the population of the towns:

When we come to compare the conditions of the town population then and now, exact, or approximately exact figures are lacking. . . . The de-

velopment of commerce in modern times has been *so* great that townspeople on the whole *may* be better off than they were in Akbar's day. . . . Contemporary travelers undoubtedly were much impressed by the wealth and prosperity of the great cities in the reigns of Akbar and Jahangir. Fitch, for example, in 1585, tells us in a passage already quoted that "Agra and Fatepore are two very great cities, either of them much greater than London and very populous. Between Agra and Fatepore are twelve miles, and all the way is a market of victuals and other things, as full as though a man were still in a town, and so many people, as if a man were in a market." Terry, from the testimony of others, describes the Punjab as "a large province, and most fruitful. Lahore is the chief city thereof, built very large, and abounds both in people and riches, one of the most principles cities for trade in all India" (page 76.). Monserrate, speaking from personal knowledge of the same city as it was in 1581, declares that Lahore was not second to any city in Europe or Asia. Every kind of merchandise was to be found in its shops, and the streets were blocked by dense crowds. Similarly Burhanpur, in Khandesh, was "very great, rich, and full of people" (page 80.).

The foreign trade of the Empire in the time of Akbar is said to have been considerable and the customs duties were not high. The King's highway between Lahore and Agra, a distance of 400 miles, shaded by high pine on both sides was considered by travelers as "one of the rarest and most beneficial works in the whole world."

Mr. Vincent Smith discusses the art of Akbar's time rather critically, but ends with the following enthusiastic eulogy of Fatehpur Sikri, the city built by Akbar's orders :

The world was ransacked to supply craftsmen and artists of every kind ; and the buildings which express their skill, even if they were ill to live in, certainly are unsurpassed in their way as achievements of architectural arts.

Nothing like Fatehpur Sikri ever was created before or can be created again. It is a "romance in stone"—the petrification of a passing mood in Akbar's strange nature, begun and finished at lightning speed while that mood lasted—inconceivable and impossible at any other time or in any other circumstances. The world may well feel grateful to the despot who was capable of committing such an inspired folly.

LALPAT RAI.

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